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What would Jesus say about baptism?

John 1:29-34

John had been sent to the desert, telling people to repent - turn from sin and turn back to God and following him. When people listened, they were baptised as a symbol of what happened. Many people came, heard him and turned back to God

But this wasn't enough. People were waiting for someone else to come; something predicted from before, someone who could deal with their sin completely, give them new hearts and a new life.

John 1: 29-34: *“Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! He is the one I was talking about when I said, ‘A man is coming after me who is far greater than I am, for he existed long before me.’ I did not recognize him as the Messiah, but I have been baptizing with water so that he might be revealed to Israel.”*

“For this reason I baptised with water”

John explains why he baptised people: so that Jesus might be revealed to Israel as their glorious Saviour.

“Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”

Why does John say that Jesus is the lamb of God? This image (of the 'lamb') goes back to the OT, 1400 years before Jesus. God had provided his people with a way to

be forgiven of sins. A lamb would be killed, in place of the person. But this was a temporary fix.

Sin is so serious that it separates us from God. God is holy, perfect, good . We are not! *'The wages of sin is death.'* Sin brings death.

For the ancient people in Israel it would either be their life or the lamb's life. We see the same thing when we want restitution. We see sin and we want it to be made right. We want banks to return money they obtained deceptively. We want criminals to pay for their crimes. If you break something, it's understood you should replace it.

Your sin is worse than you think. It's all too easy to think that we're not too bad, but the message of the Bible is that our sins are so bad that they eventually result in spiritual death. We can't undo our sin by being good. Instead, we must rely on Jesus' sacrifice.

1 Peter 1:18-20

"For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began."

There is no forgiveness without Jesus' sacrifice. Later in the story, Jesus suffers and dies in the place of people who actually deserve it. He is placed in a tomb, dead.

This is what is symbolised in baptism. Through baptism, a person identifies with Christ. As they go down below the water, this symbolises death. There is a sense that when we become Christians, we die. The Bible talks about the 'old person' and the 'new person'. The old person dies when someone turns to Jesus. This is what is symbolised in baptism. The old person no longer lives; the old core desires are gone. The person who committed the sins is now, in God's eyes, dead and cannot be punished any more. The punishment has gone on Jesus.

John later explains how he knew that Jesus was the promised messiah.

"I saw the Holy Spirit descending like a dove from heaven and resting upon him. I didn't know he was the one, but when God sent me to baptize with water, he told me, 'The one on whom you see the Spirit descend and rest is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I saw this happen to Jesus, so I testify that he is the Chosen One of God."

John didn't actually realise that Jesus was the promised one before this. God had told John he would meet the chosen one and how he would know

I says elsewhere that he saw the spirit descend on Jesus like a dove. The Holy Spirit remained with Jesus. In older times, people had been given the Spirit for a short time and it enabled them to live with God's power and to do His work. But this was a temporary thing.

With Jesus, the Spirit remained with Him. This had been prophesied hundreds of years before by a man called Isaiah:

"And the Spirit of the Lord will rest on him— the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord."

(Isaiah 11:2)

Jesus lived a life that was characterised by the power of the Spirit. He saw people healed, he spoke boldly telling people God's thoughts, he knew things he couldn't have known unless they were revealed to him, he cared for people with a love far surpassing anything humans can produce. In short, he lived a life in the Spirit. The Spirit's life was so strong, that it meant that even after Jesus died, death could not hold him. The power of the Spirit raised Jesus up to new life.

Again this is symbolised in baptism. From below the water, the person is lifted up. The old person is dead, there is now a new person living and they are not living by their own power any more, but are offered the chance to live a life empowered by the Spirit of God.

Their sin is dealt with, they have peace with God. They are now called to live a life in service to Him - following His commands and empowered by the Spirit to live these out.

Romans 8:11: *"The Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from the dead, lives in you. And just as God raised Christ Jesus from the dead, he will give life to your mortal bodies by this same Spirit living within you."*

The Spirit raised Jesus from the dead. That same Spirit now lives in you. You can have the same power to overcome sin, serve others, and hear from God. You can now bring his power into hopeless situations

And this is what we see in baptism. Without Jesus we have no hope - we have sinned, and are separated from God. But through Jesus we have hope. He died in our place to

take our punishment, as we see when the person goes into the water. Underwater, we symbolise the death we die in Christ, saying goodbye to our old life. As we rise, we identify with Jesus, who rose on the 3rd day through the power of the Spirit to live a new life

Questions:

- What are the symbolic elements in baptism?
- What does it mean for the person to go down into the water? What does it symbolise?
- The bible says we have been crucified with Christ - what do you think this means? *(Galatians 2:20 - I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.)*
- How does this change how we view our past mistakes and failings?
- What does being raised out of the water symbolise?
- How are we empowered to live a new life? What does it look like practically?
- How does the Spirit change our desires so we want to follow God? How has that looked for you?
- Have you been baptised? What led you to? Or if not, what has held you back?
- Finish with prayer.



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